

Wild Madagascar



Straddling the Tropic of Capricorn in the southwestern corner of the Indian Ocean and molded by almost 100 million years of biological isolation, lies the strange and wonderful land of Madagascar. Here, in the world's only remaining lemur stronghold, acrobatic sifakas make dazzling leaps with grace and ease, vociferous indris howl plaintively like humpback whales, and big-eyed nocturnal mouse lemurs—the world's smallest primates—snooze the day away in a hollow tree. Throughout the forest, spiny tenrecs snuffle blindly in the leaf litter while rainbow-colored chameleons—with tongues longer than their bodies—stalk their prey with camouflage and stealth. The island is home to most of the world's chameleon species—some a meter long, some no longer than a matchstick.

On the world's fourth-largest island—Madagascar is roughly the size of California—the terrain can change dramatically in only a few dozen miles. Dry spiny forests transition to lush humid rain forests and tropical savannahs will surrender to cool forested highland plateaus. With more than 3,000 miles of coastline and over 250 islands, Madagascar is home to one of the world's largest coral reef systems and dynamic mangrove habitats. For millions of years, life on Madagascar evolved with little competition. The monkeys, cats, jackals and hyenas that doomed lemur ancestors on the African continent never made it to this magical island. Today, Madagascar is one of the most unique—and most endangered—ecosystems on the planet. The growing human population, slash-and-burn agriculture, and a host of other environmental stresses threaten to eradicate this great wildlife treasure. Many of the island's species teeter on the brink of extinction.



Early in our travels we photograph at Isalo National Park. Here, lemurs cavort amidst verdant canyons surrounded by a photogenic landscape of time-worn sandstone formations akin to Bryce Canyon in the American Southwest. Popularly known as “Jurassic Park” the area is known for the wealth of Jurassic-era fossils that have been discovered here. Many unusual endemic plants grow alongside the lush secluded oases and sparkling waterfalls that provide excellent photo opportunities. Another wonder here is the extremely low level of light pollution making photography of the night sky a possibility as the Milky Way stretches from horizon above silhouettes of the sculpted rock landscape.

Later, in the highlands, we visit the Peyrieras Madagascar Exotic Reserve, a private endemic animal collection where we can pose and photograph a spectacular variety of chameleons, leaf-tailed geckos, frogs, snakes and insects. At Perinet Reserve, we are up with the sun to catch the dawn chorus of hefty

panda-patterned indris, we shoot at Lemur Island—home to several photogenic lemur species, we search for sleeping chameleons on a nocturnal walk, and we photograph as many of the wildlife wonders as we and our guides can find.

A visit to the Avenue des Baobabs produces iconic images of these colossal trees at sunrise and sunset. Here, baobabs up to 800 years old tower in isolation—a legacy of the dense tropical forests that once thrived on Madagascar. We photograph stunning tropical beaches, vibrant outdoor markets and lush forested waterways.

To cap off our discovery of Madagascar’s wonders, we travel through dry spiny forest landscapes with weird and wonderful “Dr. Seuss-like” flora to Berenty Reserve where white-furred sifakas skip across the red earth and ringtail lemurs clamber for bananas. Tiny lepilemurs peer sleepily from their nests in hollow trees as we walk by.

Photographing Madagascar is a unique experience that requires a keen sense of adventure—Madagascar is a third world country by any stretch of the imagination. It operates on “Madagascar time” schedules. Roads are poor. It is often hot and humid. *Fady*—taboos believed to be enforced by supernatural powers permeate the Malagasy culture. But, unlike other tours that spend days driving from location to location we counterpoint these inherent shortcomings by flying exclusively on privately chartered airplanes between long distances and stay in the best available accommodations as we travel. At midday there is often time to relax, swim in the hotel pool, or download your photos.



Join our intrepid group on this amazing Madagascar adventure and photograph the fascinating array of endemic flora and fauna, all of which combine to make for a truly exceptional photo safari! Time is growing short to see one of the world’s truly unique natural spectacles.

Tour Itinerary

Day 1

Depart from home.

Day 2 (Sep 20)

Arrive in Antananarivo or “Tana,” the capital of Madagascar, from Paris, Johannesburg or Nairobi. It is highly recommended to arrive in Tana one day early to recover from jet lag and have time to rest. (D)

Days 3–4

We fly by private charter to Morondava on Day 3. After we are established in our hotel we depart for a sunset photo shoot at the Avenue des Baobabs throughout the kilometer-long road we can enjoy different views and create photogenic compositions of the towering *Renala*—the “mother of the forest”—Malagasy for Grandidier’s baobab. During the time of our visit the baobabs have dropped their leaves exposing their graphic trunks and branches. The next morning we return to Baobab Alley” for a sunrise photo session. In the afternoon we continue on to Kirindy Reserve, famous for giant jumping rats and habitat for seven species of lemur and a number of endemic reptiles. (BLD)

Day 5–6

Our charter planes await us on the morning of Day 5 to deliver us to Isalo National Park in Madagascar’s remote southwest. A wonderful variety of landscapes and habitats are found within this 300-square-mile protected area including grassland, dry forest, luxuriant canyons, weather-sculpted sandstone formations, and oases lined with palm trees as well as lakes and rivers. We roam through pinnacles of eroded sandstone—evoking



images of giant sandcastles—and photograph deep gorges filled with crystal blue water. Within these canyons dwell as many as 14 species of lemurs as well as 80 species of birds and a variety of chameleons and other reptiles and endemic frogs. With a clear sky the Milky Way will grab our attention as we head out for a shoot of the starry sky. (BLD)

Days 7–9

We fly to Fort Dauphin and drive to Berenty—a private gallery forest reserve in the desert and the best place to shoot the iconic spiny forest and its wildlife inhabitants. We photograph “dancing” Verreaux’s sifaka lemurs skipping sideways across the red earth. Also common are wild, but human-habituated, ring-tailed and brown lemurs. Here they leap from tree to tree, sometimes landing on branches covered with thorns. The ringtails beg for bananas and sun themselves clustered together in endearing family groups. We also photograph lepilemurs, radiated tortoises, and a collection of bizarre endemic plants such as the octopus tree with “tentacles” bristling with thorns, and the pachypodiums—spiny

succulents commonly called “elephant’s foot” because of the bulbous trunk. (BLD)

Day 10

Following breakfast we fly directly from Berenty to Antananarivo. After settling into our comfortable home base in Tana we visit and photograph a local Tana craft market in the afternoon. (BLD)



Day 11

We drive eastward from Tana toward our destination of Andasibe–Mantadia National Park. En route we stop to photograph a private wildlife collection at the estate of famed wildlife biologist André Peyriéras, with access to as many as twelve species of chameleons, extraordinary leaf-tailed geckos, colorful frogs, bizarre predatory insects, dinner plate-sized moths and a good variety of butterflies. Though the place is a bit run down, the photography opportunities here are very good. We continue on to Andasibe. (BLD)

Days 12–13

Andasibe–Mantadia National Park is one of the jewels of the Malagasy park system. Its extensive rain forest trails provide access to several intriguing species of lemurs and a photogenic variety of other animals. We visit Analamazaotra Special Reserve—commonly called Perinet. This is the land of the indri, the largest surviving lemur that resembles a panda with a 20-foot leap. Locally known as *babakoto*—usually translated as “ancestor” or “father”—groups of indri “sing” from the treetops sounding like a pod of humpback whales. We may need to walk off-trail to photograph them in the treetops.

Some of the largest and smallest chameleons live in Mantadia, plus amazingly camouflaged leaf-tailed geckos and wooly lemurs snoozing in the branches.

Lemur Island allows for incomparable access to a number of lemur species, including the rare bamboo lemurs. We can venture out at night to see dwarf and mouse lemurs, and hunt sleeping chameleons with their ghost-like night coloration and their tails tucked into tight spirals. (BLD)

Days 14–16

This morning we head to Manambato where we board a motorized canoe to Palmarium—Akanin’ny Nofy private reserve on the shores of Lake Ampitabe. Akanin’ny Nofy translates from Malagasy as “nest of dreams,” and the area is definitely dreamlike. With sparkling white sand beaches lying against deep blue water, this peaceful and relaxing haven is home to lush forests, scattered orchids, strings of lakes and mangroves. All these factors have made the reserve one of the most popular vacation spots in Madagascar—and a spectacular location for photographers. Ten species of lemurs live in freedom in the reserve, including



Coquerel's sifakas, black and white ruffed lemurs, crowned lemurs, mouse lemurs, black lemurs, indris and aye-ayes, plus a host of reptiles and amphibians. This protected area is habitat to nearly 100,000 photogenic *Ravenala madagascariensis*, or "traveler's palms," endemic to Madagascar. At midday may enjoy a swim in the warm waters of Lake Ampitabe. (BLD)

Day 17 (Oct 6)

After an early breakfast we have a 3-hour boat ride and lunch in Tomasina, followed by a return flight to Tana. Dayrooms are provided at our comfortable hotel near the airport to rest before a late night transfer to the airport. (BLD)

Day 18

Depending on your flight schedule, you may depart late on Day 17 or in the early morning hours of Day 18.

Day 19

Arrive Home.

Trip Details

Sep 19 - Oct 7, 2020

Fee: **\$12,595** from Antananarivo, Madagascar

Deposit: **\$1,000**

Limit: **10**

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Tour Leader



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